



Introduction

Every day, more than a million travelers pour into our international airports and cross our land borders into the United States. Some travelers have their baggage filled with agricultural products and food for relatives or friends. With respect to international trade, millions of pounds of fresh fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, herbs and other items enter the United States via commercial shipments from other countries every year.

Although these items appear to be harmless, there could be hidden threats in that baggage and in those truckloads, trainloads and containers of fresh items that could seriously threaten U.S. agriculture, our natural resources and our economy.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agriculture specialists and CBP officers at U.S. ports of entry and international mail facilities target, detect, intercept and thereby prevent the entry of these potential threats before they have a chance to do any harm. Since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in March 2003, there has been a greater cadre of agriculture specialists and law enforcement professional performing these duties.

Global Travel and Trade



The important job of the CBP agriculture specialists has become more and more challenging in today's global trade environment. Travel and trade have continued to increase and grow more complex.

Agro-terrorism

Unfortunately, our post 9/11 world includes a new and dangerous threat. This threat is agro-terrorism. Agro-terrorism is terrorism targeting some component of agriculture or the food supply. Examples include the international introduction of a plant or animal pest or disease or contamination of food materials with a toxic substance. Agricultural inspections have traditionally focused on unintentional introduction of pests or diseases—those unnoticed in someone's luggage or hitchhiking on the walls of a container. Now we need to focus on the deliberate introduction of these threats.

With the added danger of agro-terrorism, the role of the CBP agriculture specialists at our ports of entry is more crucial than ever.

Americans demand fresh and varied food items every day. One in five food items is now imported. We can now have fresh strawberries when it's 20 degrees below zero. American consumers demand fresh limes and blueberries all year round. In fact, during the winter months in the United States, nearly 80 percent of the fresh fruits and vegetables on our tables come from other countries.

With the ever-increasing amount of trade, new pest pathways are discovered and the agricultural risks to the United States grow. The threat to crops and livestock is real.

Agriculture Inspections and Homeland Security

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 required federal agencies to take steps to assure the continued safety of food and agricultural resources. As part of the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in March 2003, the CBP Agriculture specialist position was created. This position arms the CBP inspectional force with specialized knowledge and skills at the nation's ports of entry.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) makes policy regarding which agricultural items may be brought into the United States from foreign countries and which ones must be kept out. CBP agriculture specialists enforce those agricultural laws and regulations at the ports of entry. USDA-APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine programs use scientific risk assessment and strict regulations to weigh the risks associated with agricultural imports and to restrict them (pending treatment or other method) or to prohibit their entry.



Each year, CBP agriculture specialists intercept tens of thousands of “actionable pests”—those identified through scientific risk assessment and study as being dangerous to the health and safety of U.S. agriculture resources.

Every day, at international airports, seaports and land border crossings, CBP agriculture specialists are in the passenger terminals, the cargo areas and at the international mail facilities, using their specialized training and their expertise in natural and biological sciences to protect American agriculture. The CBP agriculture specialists work with specialized x-ray machines that detect organic materials. They utilize agricultural canines specifically trained to sniff out meat and plant materials. They check containers and trucks for smuggled agricultural products or packaging materials that might contain invasive species that could harm our agriculture and environment. They inspect vessels for hitchhiking pests, such as Asian Gypsy Moths, as well as for prohibited fruit fly host material, foreign birds and other plant pests in vessel stores. They examine wooden pallets that could hide the larvae of wood-boring insects poised to attack native trees or nursery stock and they make sure that imported fruits and vegetable are pest-free.

FY 2008 Agriculture Inspection Statistics

Agriculture Inspections	25,194,334
Agriculture Interceptions (meats and plants that are prohibited entry into the U.S.)	1,505,691
*Animal Byproduct Interceptions	18,102
*Meat/Poultry Interceptions	369,705
*Plant Material Interceptions	1,117,884
Total Violations	53,950

Therefore, **on a typical day**, CBP Agriculture Specialists made 4,125 seizures of prohibited meat, plant materials or animal products, including 435 agricultural pests at ports of entry.